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ENGLISH DRAMATIC COMPANIES IN THE TOWNS OUTSIDE OF LONDON, 1550-1600.

DURING the first half of the sixteenth century we find two general classes of actors in England, those who depended on their acting for a living, and those who acted only a few times a year and did not depend on their acting for a livelihood; the first class we may call the "professional players;" the second, "the amateur players." By 1550, however, the professional players had to a large extent superseded the amateur players, and the danger of the comparatively incompetent acting of the amateur players (they had both less time and less incentive to practice their art than the professional players) arresting our drama at the miracle- and morality-stage, had been averted.

Though the main reason for this triumph of the professional players is probably to be found in the confirmation of the hostile attitude of the stricter churchmen toward the miracle- and morality-plays—with which the amateur players were mainly concerned—by the growing Protestant sentiment, still the custom of traveling for the purpose of giving performances at the principal provincial towns, instituted by the professional companies, was of considerable importance in bringing it about. If the town authorities desired a play given, not only was it less trouble to hire a professional company than to train a number of citizens for the performance, but, as a rule, it was also less expensive and the work was more satisfactorily done. It is not surprising, then, to find that after the middle of the sixteenth century practically all dramatic performances given in England were in the hands of the professional companies, and that they came to look upon their tours through the country as a by no means unimportant or unremunerative part of their work.

It is the object of this paper to give some account of the customs of these companies—their methods of performance, their relations to the town authorities, the amounts they were paid, etc., while touring the towns outside of London from 1550 to 1600.

Before attempting this, however, it may be well to point out that, in spite of the growing Protestant sentiment against plays and players and the hostile attitude of the stricter churchmen, the popularity of the drama during these years was very great. This is conclusively shown, not only by the number of performances of which we have record, but also by the fact that during these years we find notices in the town accounts of Leicester, Nottingham, Oxford, Shrewsbury, Bristol, Doncaster, Plymouth, Beverley, Bath, and Stratford-on-Avon of no less than fifty-six dramatic companies. That these companies were all distinct and, as regards individual actors, mutually exclusive, is highly improbable, for we know it was the custom of the players to pass from one company to another and for the companies to change their names with a change of patron. So under different company names we may be dealing with the same actors. But, even allowing for this, the number of actors in England during the half-century must have been very great, and Walsingham's statement that in 1586 there were two hundred players in or near London¹ is probably no exaggeration. The existence of so large a body of players, who depended upon their profession for a living, can be accounted for only by supposing a widespread popularity of dramatic performances during these years.

The dramatic companies which visited the provincial towns fall naturally into three classes: First, the companies which performed in London as well as in the country towns. They were always under the patronage of royalty or some great nobleman. I have called them the "London Companies." In this division may be classed the Children of the Chapel Royal who acted in Leicester in 1591.² Secondly, the companies which performed in the country towns, but not in London, and were under the patronage of some nobleman or great commoner. I have called them the "Noblemen's Companies." Thirdly, those companies which bore the name of some town. They never acted in London, but traveled over the country, acting in various towns. I have called them the "Town Companies."

¹ Quoted in *Lights of the Old English Stage* (New York: Appleton & Co., 1878), p. 8.

² W. KELLY, *Notices of Leicester* (London, 1865), p. 226.

In addition to these more or less regularly authorized companies, there were undoubtedly many vagabond companies which bore no name and whose performances it is impossible to trace.

The modern custom of sending an advance agent to the town to be visited several days before the coming of the company, to make the necessary arrangements for the visit, was not in vogue during the years 1550-1600; at least, I have been unable to find any record of such a custom. Even the great London Companies, when touring the country, seem to have given the town authorities no notice of their coming, and to have trusted to their good-will for permission to play and for a place to play in.

The first concern of a company upon arriving in a town was to obtain permission to play. Before 1572 any company of vagabonds could palm themselves off as a dramatic company, if they could succeed in hoodwinking the town authorities. But in that year a law was passed requiring that

all fencers, bearwards, common players in interludes, and minstrels, not belonging to any Baron of this realm, or to any other honorable personage of greater degree; all jugglers, pedlars, tinkers and petty chapmen, which said fencers, bearwards, common players in interludes, minstrels, etc., shall wander about, and not have license of two justices of the peace at the least, shall be deemed and dealt with as rogues and vagabonds.¹

Consequently, after 1572, when a company of players arrived in a town where they wanted to play, they at once presented their license to the civic authorities or satisfied them that they belonged to some "baron" or "honorable" person of the realm. Thus in the Leicester records for 1583 we find the following entry:²

	Tuesday the third day of March, 1583, certain players who said they were the servants of the Queen's Majesty's
Mr. Mayor	Master of the Revels, who required license to play and for
Mr. J. Tata	their authority showed forth an Indenture of License from
Mr. Morton	one Mr. Edmund Tylney, Esquire, Master of her Majesty's Revels, of the one part, and George Haysell of Wisbeach in the Isle of Ely, in the County of Cambridge, gentleman, on the other part.

¹ J. P. COLLIER, *The History of English Dramatic Poetry to the Time of Shakespeare: and Annals of the Stage to the Restoration* (1879), Vol. I, p. 195.

² Quotations and extracts have been modernized in spelling throughout.

The which Indenture is dated the 6th day of February in the 25th year of her Majesty's reign, etc. In which Indenture there is one article, that all Justices, Mayors, Sheriffs, Bailiffs, Constables, and all other her officers, Ministers, and Subjects whatsoever, to be aiding and assisting unto the said Edmund Tylney, his Deputies and Assignees, attending and having due regard unto such persons as shall disorderly intrude themselves into any the doings and actions before mentioned, not being reformed, qualified and bound to the orders prescribed by the said Edmund Tylney.¹ These shall be therefore not only to signify and give notice unto all and every her said Justices, etc., that none, of their own pretended authority intrude themselves and presume to show forth any such plays, interludes, tragedies, comedies, or shows in any places within this realm, without the orderly allowance thereof under the hand of the said Edmund.

Note. No play is to be played, but such as is allowed by the said Edmund, and his hand at the latter end of the said book they do play.

The aforesaid Haysell is now the chief player, etc.²

A few days later the Earl of Worcester's Company arrived in Leicester, and the records give us a short summary of the license:

William, Earl of Worcester, etc., hath by his writing, dated the 14th of January, A° 25° Eliz. R^e licensed his Servants, viz., Robt. Browne, James Tunstall, Edward Allen, Wm. Harryson, Tho. Cooke, Richard Johnes, Edward Browne, Richard Andrews to play and go abroad, using themselves orderly, etc. (in these words, etc.). These are therefore to require all such Her Highness' officers to whom these presents shall come quietly and friendly within your several precincts and corporations, to permit and suffer them to pass with your furtherance, using and demeaning themselves honestly and to give them (the rather for my sake) such entertainment as other noblemen's players have (In Witness, etc.).³

In 1597 a law was passed reviving the act of 1572 and requiring, in addition, that

the players of the nobility, wandering abroad, should be "authorized to play" under "the hand and seal of arms" of the Baron or personage of greater degree.⁴

¹ Edmund Tylney was master of Her Majesty's Revels from 1578 to 1610; cf. "Henslowe's Diary," ed. J. PAYNE COLLIER, *Publications of the Shakspeare Society* (London, 1845), Introduction, p. xxix.

² WILLIAM KELLY, *op. cit.* (1865), pp. 211, 212.

³ KELLY, *op. cit.*, pp. 212, 213.

⁴ COLLIER, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 195, note.

The exemption of these two laws in favor of noblemen's servants was taken away by the act of 1603-4.¹

It seems to have been the custom in some towns for the players to give a first performance before the town authorities and those citizens who wished to attend, no admission being charged, but the players receiving a "reward" from the mayor. Thus Willis, in his *Mount Tabor*, 1639, describing the performance of the *Cradle of Security* seen by him when a boy, says:

In the city of Gloucester the manner is (as I think it is in other like corporations) that when Players of Enterludes come to town, they first attend the Mayor, to inform him what noble-man's servants they are, and so get license for their public playing: and if the Mayor like the actors, or would show respect to their Lord and Master, he appoints them to play their first play before himself and the aldermen and Common Council of the City; and that is called the Mayor's play, where everyone that will comes in without money, the Mayor giving the players a reward as he thinks fit, to show respect unto them.²

In the Bristol accounts for August, 1576, we find an entry which apparently refers to such a performance and gives ample evidence that these "free shows" were fully appreciated by the citizens:

Item, pd: for 2 rings of iron to be set upon the houses of the one side of the Guildhall door to rear the door from the ground and for mending the cramp of iron which shooteth the bar, which cramp was stretched with the press of people at the play of My Lord Chamberlain's servants in the Guildhall before Mr. Mayor and the Aldermen—6d.³

That this first performance before the mayor and aldermen was always free to the citizens, the players being satisfied with their reward, as Mr. W. Kelly states,⁴ and as Mr. E. K. Chambers seems to imply when he says referring to the players, "In the towns they would give their first performance before the municipality in the guild-hall and take a reward,"⁵ is highly improbable.

¹ E. K. CHAMBERS, *The Mediæval Stage* (Clarendon Press, 1903), Vol. I, p. 55, note.

² COLLIER, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 196.

³ J. F. NICHOLLS AND JOHN TAYLOR, *Bristol Past and Present* (Bristol and London, 1881), Vol. I, pp. 234, 235.

⁴ KELLY, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

⁵ *The Mediæval Stage*, Vol. II, p. 189. The evidence quoted above from Willis, *Mount Tabor*, and used by Mr. Chambers in proof of his assertion, refers not to the old amateur players of interludes, but to the professional "noble-man's servants."

In the town accounts we find frequent entries such as the following in the Leicester Records:

- 1555. Item. Pd. to the Queen's Players, over and above that was gathered — 3s. 6d.
- 1559. Item. To the Queen's Players, beside the money that was gathered — 3s. 6d.
- 1592. Item. The 19th of December, given to the Lord Admiral's Players, more than was gathered — 8s.¹

Now, both the amount paid and the fact that there is only one such entry during the stay of the company in the town indicate that these rewards were given for a single performance, and most likely for the first performance before the mayor and council. If this is the case, it is obvious that an entrance fee was often charged at these first performances and the mayor's "reward" added to the amount collected for the benefit of the players. Very likely, as the visits of dramatic companies to the towns became more frequent, their credentials more reliable, and their plays and players better known, this "free" performance, which was at first the only way the authorities had of testing the merits of the plays and players, was done away with, and the mayor and aldermen attended, if at all officially, the first regular performance, the old custom of giving the players a "reward" out of the city coffers being continued. The fact that after 1550 the vast majority of entries in the town records of payments to companies of players are of "rewards" which have been added to the "money that was gathered" is almost conclusive proof of this.

Not only did the town authorities thus "show respect" unto the players, as Willis quaintly puts it, but often, if for some reason they refused to allow the company to play, they still gave them their "reward." Thus in the Leicester accounts we find the following entries:

- 1591. Item. Given to the Lord Dacre's Players in reward, which were not suffered to play — 2s. 6d.
- Item. Given to the Earl of Worcester's Players in reward, for that they did not play — 10s.²

Even after the system of licensing the companies was inaugu-

¹ KELLY, *op. cit.*, pp. 194, 227.

² *Ibid.*, p. 226.

rated, the town authorities were often imposed upon, and even defied, by the bands of players. In the Leicester Records there is an interesting account of a case of this kind. In the quotations from the records, we saw that on March 3, 1583, a company claiming to be the servants of the Queen's Majesty's Master of the Revels received permission to play in Leicester upon presenting an indenture of license from Edw. Tylney Esq., Master of Her Majesty's Revels, and George Haysell of Wisbeach, in the Isle of Ely, Gentleman (the chief player of the company).¹

Another entry, on March 6, states that—

Certain players came before Mr. Mayor at the Hall, there being present Mr. John Tata, Mr. George Tata, Mr. Morton, and Mr. Worship: who said they were the Earl of Worcester's men: who said the aforesaid players were not lawfully authorized, and that they² had taken from them their commission; but it is untrue, for they forgot their box at the Inn in Leicester, and so these men got it; and they said, the said Haysell was not here himself and they sent the same to Grantom to the said Haysell who dwelleth there.³

The entry then gives an abstract of the license presented by Worcester's men, and proceeds:

Mr. Mayor did give the aforesaid players an Angel towards their dinner and willed them not to play at this present: being friday the 6th of March, for that the time was not convenient.

The aforesaid players met Mr. Mayor in the street near Mr. Newcome's house, after the Angel was given about a 2 hours, who then craved license again to play at their Inn, and he told them they should not, then they went away and said they would play, whether he would or not, and in despite of him, with divers other evil and contemptuous words: Witness hereof Mr. Newcome, Mr. Wycam, and William Dethicke.

More, these men, contrary to Mr. Mayor's commandment, went with their drum and trumpets through the town, in contempt of Mr. Mayor, neither would come at his commandment, by his officer, viz: Worship

Wm. Pateson my lord Harbard's man	} these 2 were they which
Tho. Powlton my lord of Worcester's man	

did so much abuse Mr. Mayor in the aforesaid words.

Nota. These said players have submitted themselves and are sorry for these words past and craved pardon, desiring his worship not to write to their master again, and so upon their submission they are licensed to play this night at their inn; and also they have promised that upon the stage, in the beginning of their play, to show to the hearers that

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 82, 83.

² Worcester's men?

³ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

they are licensed to play by Mr. Mayor and his good will, and that they are sorry for the words past.¹

Not only were the players often in conflict with the civil authorities, but they also, at times, formed a bone of contention between the civil and spiritual powers. From the treasurer's accounts for the city of Edinburgh for November, 1599, it appears that a company of English players, of whom Laurence Fletcher was manager, obtained a warrant from the king to act in public. They accordingly proclaimed with drums and trumpets that they would act at a house in Blackfriar's Wynd in Edinburgh. The four sessions of the church promptly announced that anyone who attended the performance would be under the kirk's severest displeasure. The entry then states that, by His "Majesty's directions," Sir George Elphinstone delivered certain moneys to the players, and then continues :

Item. To the aforesaid messenger, passing with letters to the Mercat Croce of Edinburgh, charging the elders and deacons of the whole four sessions of Edinburgh to annul their act, made for the discharge of certain English Comedians. 10s. 8d.

The four sessions accordingly annulled their act against the players, and the ministers announced the fact from the pulpit.²

The players had their own methods of defying the hostility of the clergy. When in 1547 Bishop Gardiner announced that he would hold "a solemn dirge in honour of the late king at St. Mary Overies," the players of Bankside issued the following proclamation: "They will act a solemn play to try who shall have most resort, they in game or he in earnest."³

That the players were often indiscreet in their treatment of the authorities is shown by the letter of Nicholson to Lord Burleigh on April 15, 1598, in which he says :

It is regretted that the Comedians of London should scorn the King and the people of this land in their play; and it is wished that the matter be speedily amended, lest the King and the country be stirred to anger.⁴

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 212-14.

² J. C. DIBDIN, *Annals of the Edinburgh Stage* (Edinburgh, 1888), p. 23.

³ WILLIAM RENDLE, *Old Southwark and its People* (Southwark, 1878), p. 215.

⁴ DIBDIN, *op. cit.*, p. 21; quoted from the *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Scotland*, II, p. 749.

The elders of the four sessions of Edinburgh made the same charge against the English Comedians as a partial justification of their refusing them the right to play in 1599.¹

In spite of occasional quarrels with the various powers that be, the regularly licensed companies of players were usually welcomed heartily by the authorities of the towns they visited. They were even highly honored at times, for in 1601 we find the members of a company of English players, called the "King's Servants," in Scotland, of whom Laurence Fletcher was chief actor and manager, receiving the freedom of the city while visiting Aberdeen.²

Having obtained permission to play, the next concern of the company was to notify the townsfolk of the time and place of the performance. Sometimes this was done by the town authorities, as in the case of Southampton, where we find the authorities issuing an order informing the townsfolk "that a famous company just arrived would play at convenient times."³ More often, however, the players themselves proclaimed with drum and trumpet the time and place of their entertainment.⁴

The places of performance varied from a private house or inn to the guild-hall or a regular playhouse. If the following entries refer to private houses, and not to inns, it seems probable that such performances were usually given on festive occasions. Thus in the Nottingham accounts for December 7, 1603, we read:

Richard Jackson committed for suffering players to sound their trumpets and playing in the house without license and for suffering his guests to be out all night.⁵

The expenses of such performances were probably borne by the owner of the house. Possibly the following entry in the same accounts for 1572 also refers to such a performance:

Item. Paid to Master Harpbam for ale, when the Queen's Players did play at his house—6d.⁶

¹ DIBDIN, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³ REV. J. S. DAVIES, *A History of Southampton* (Southampton and London, 1883), p. 217.

⁴ Cf. above, pp. 7, 8.

⁵ *Records of the Borough of Nottingham* (London, 1839), Vol. IV, p. 268.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 143. It is to be noted in connection with the two above entries that from 1550 on the inns were almost invariably designated by their sign, and not by their owner's name.

If so, it would apparently indicate that sometimes the town authorities paid for the ale or wine consumed by the players. It may be that in such cases the owner of the house was an alderman or some other municipal dignitary.

Again, in the Leicester accounts for 1571 we find the following entry:

Item. Pd: for wine that was given to Derby's men at Matthew Norris' wedding—6d.¹

In some of the towns the usual place for performances was the church—an obvious survival of the custom of the miracle- and interlude-players. In the Doncaster and Plymouth records such entries as the following are common:

1574, Aug. 2. To Lord of Leicester [’s men] for playing in the church—20s.²

1559-60. Lord Robert Dudley's players for playing in the church—20s.³

So strong a hold had this custom taken in some places that in 1602 we find the town authorities of Syston in Leicestershire paying a company of players a “reward” on refusing them the privilege of playing in the church. The entry reads:

Paid to Lord Morden's players because they should not play in the Church—xii d.⁴

In other towns, the town- or guild-hall was the customary place of performance. In the Oxford and Nottingham records we find such entries as the following:

Oxford: 1562, June 8. Given to my Lord of Warwick's players when they played in the Guildhall—6s. 8d.⁵

Nottingham: 1577, August. Earl of Sussex (Men) at Town Hall—13s. 4d.⁶

Just as in the case of performances in the churches, when a

¹ KELLY, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

² JOHN TOMLINSON, *Doncaster from the Roman Occupation to the Present Time*, 1887, p. 47.

³ R. M. WORTH, *Calendar of the Plymouth Municipal Records* (Plymouth, 1893), p. 117.

⁴ KELLY, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁵ WILLIAM H. TURNER, *Selections from the Records of Oxford from Henry VIII. to Elizabeth* (1509-1583). By William H. Turner, (Oxford and London: Jas. Parker & Co., 1880) p. 299.

⁶ *Records of Nottingham*, Vol. IV, p. 168.

company was refused the right to use the town- or guild-hall, the town authorities considered it necessary to pay them a "reward." Thus in Leicester, 1586, we find this entry:

Item. Given to Earl of Essex players in Reward being not suffered to play at the Hall—20s.¹

When the players could not obtain the church or town-hall, they would resort to their inn or the inn-yard. Thus in the quotation above, on p. 7, when the Worcester Company was refused permission to play by the Leicester authorities, they said they would play at their inn whether the mayor wished or no. It does not seem likely, however, that the more important companies were often driven to this after 1550, as there are very few records of such being the case. Possibly the minor companies and mountebanks had more often to put up with such quarters, as in the following case at Leicester:

1590. Item. Given to certain players, playing upon ropes at the Cross Keys, more than was gathered—28s. 4d.²

In the same year, Worcester's, Hartford's, and the Queen's men played at the hall.

Sometimes when there was no suitable place available for the players to perform in, the authorities would prepare a place for them. Thus when the English players visited Edinburgh in 1599, we find the king ordering the "bailies" of the city to assist the players in preparing a place at his charges. This is the entry in the treasurer's accounts:

Item. By his Majesty's directions given to Sir George Elphingstone to be delivered to the English Comedians, to buy timber for the preparation of a house to their pastime as the said Sir George's ticket bears £40.³

The place chosen was Blackfriar's Wynd, not the historic playing-ground of Edinburgh, Greenside. The latter was made over to the Burgh of Edinburgh by James II., in 1456, for "tournaments, sports, and proper warlike deeds to be done and accomplished there for the pleasure of us and our successors."⁴ Plays and players soon took the place of tournaments and knights, and

¹ KELLY, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

² *Ibid.*, p. 224.

³ DIBDIN, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 8

in 1554 we find Sir David Lindsay's *Three Estates* being performed there. At this time there were several buildings on the playfield, as the following entry shows:

Item. Paid for making of the Queen's Grace's house on the playfield, beside the convoy house under the same, and the players' house, the gibbets and scaffold about the same, and boards on the playfield, carrying of them from the town to the field, and therefrom again, the cutting and inlaying of great and small timber, with the nails and workmanship of 6 wrights, two days thereto, pinners fees, cart hire and other necessities, as Sir William M'Dougall, master of work's ticket bears. £16. 5s. 4d.¹

Greenside was used for plays as late as 1588, for on "November 1, John Hill who was tenant of that land 'was discharged of any tilling and riving of any part of the playfield.'"²

Some such place for performance of plays existed in Shrewsbury in 1533, when plays were given in the "quarry outside the walls." Referring to this place in 1570, it is stated "that the places have been accustomed to be used." Here there were traces of a seated amphitheater as late as 1779.³ If players visited Shrewsbury from 1550 to 1600, they may possibly have used this place for their performances.

A few of the towns outside of London had regular playhouses, which were probably used for other purposes when no dramatic company was using them. Mr. E. K. Chambers found evidence of a playhouse in Exeter as early as 1348.⁴ In the town records of Great Yarmouth we find that—

after the Reformation the Corporation erected "a game house," and in 1538 when they granted a lease of these premises to Robert Copping they stipulated that he should "permit and suffer all such players and their audiences to have the pleasure and use of said house and game place, at all such times as any interlude or plays should be ministered or played at any time; without any profit thereof to his or his assigns to be taken."⁵

In Worcester in 1584 a lease of the "vacant place where

¹*Ibid.*, p. 9; quoted from town records.

²*Ibid.*, p. 13; quoted from town records.

³*Books of Council Orders in Historical MSS*, Report XV, Appendix, Pt. X, p. 16, and in E. PHILLIPS, *History of Shrewsbury*, p. 201; quoted by E. K. CHAMBERS, *The Mediaeval Stage*, Vol. II, p. 394.

⁴E. K. CHAMBERS, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 190.

⁵CHAS. JOHN PALMER, *Perustration of Great Yarmouth with Gorleston and Southtown* (Great Yarmouth, 1872), Vol. I, p. 351.

pagants do stand" was granted for building, and there was a building known as the "Pageant House" as late as 1738. Whether or not this was used for plays does not appear.¹

Sometimes the players gave their entertainment in the evening, as in the case of the Worcester Company at Leicester in March, 1583,² though it seems probable that their usual time of performance was in the afternoon, as in London.

Sometimes, when traveling, the players were accompanied by a band of musicians. We come across such records as the following:

Nottingham: December 19, 1578—To Lord Haworth's players and musicians. 5s.³

Doncaster: 1578—Item. To My Lord Dacre's players and musicians. 13s. 4d.⁴

An entry in the Shrewsbury records may indicate that sometimes a company of players was accompanied by a band of musicians which regularly belonged to another company. It is as follows:

1591. Paid to L of Darby's musicians and Earl of Worcester's players. 22s. 8d.⁵

Of course, this may mean merely that these musicians and players performed separately and the payments to them were lumped together in one entry. But the amount, while large, does not seem an adequate reward for two separate performances of such famous companies, for in the same year such an insignificant company as Lord Beacham's was paid by the Shrewsbury authorities 13s. 4d.⁶ for one performance, and in 1590 Worcester's men received in Leicester, also for one performance, 20s.⁷

As many of the entries in the town records already quoted will have indicated, the players relied for remuneration for their services on two sources—the "gifts" or "rewards" granted them by

¹ Quoted by E. K. CHAMBERS, *loc. cit.*, p. 398.

² Cf. above, p. 7.

³ *Records of the Borough of Nottingham* (London, 1889), Vol. IV, p. 183.

⁴ JOHN TOMLINSON, *Doncaster from the Roman Occupation to the Present Time* (1887), p. 50.

⁵ OWEN AND BLAKENEY, *History of Shrewsbury* (Shrewsbury, 1825), Vol. I. p. 394.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

⁷ KELLY, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

the town authorities or, in the case of Edinburgh, by the king, and the admission fee.

The relative amount of income derived from these two sources about 1590 can be estimated from an interesting entry in the Leicester records.¹ Under the date October 30, 1590, we find the following:

Receipts towards the charges of the Gifts given to Noblemen's Players:—

Imprimis. Received at the Hall door the 30th day of October, The Queen's Majesty's Players then playing—10s.

Item. Received at the Hall door, the Earl of Worcester's players then playing—6s. 8d.

Item. Received at the Hall door, the Earl of Hartford's players then playing—6s. 8d.

Item. Received of John Underwood, the Mayor's Sergeant, which was by him received of the Mayor's Brethren for 6 plays and one Bear Baiting—44s.

Item. Received more of the 48s, for the same plays and Bear Baiting—48s.

Total 5£, 15s, 4d.

Item. The 30th of October, given to the Queen's Majesty's Players, by the appointment of Mr. Mayor and his Brethren—40s.

Item. Given to the Earl of Worcester's Players, by the appointment of Mr. Mayor and his Brethren—20s.

Item. The 22nd of November, given to the Earl of Hartford's Players by the appointment, aforesaid—20s.

According to this account, which probably deals only with the first performances (if there were any others²), in which alone the city authorities seem to have been interested financially, the "rewards" or "gifts" given by them to the players are considerably greater than the receipts for admission. Thus, while the receipts at the hall door for the performance of the Queen's Company were only 10s., their "reward" out of the city purse was 30s., and in the case of Worcester's men 6s. 8d. at the door and 13s. 4d. from the city. The average amount taken at the door seems to have been about 7s., while the "gifts" from the city vary from 10s. to 40s. for the more important London Companies, the

¹ *Ibid.*

² Cf. below pp. 17, 18.

Queen's usually obtaining the greatest "reward." The Noblemen's and Town Companies had often to be satisfied with such small amounts as 2s. 6d., or 5s. for "rewards," with which amounts Lord Dacre's players are credited in 1591 and 1592.¹

Kelly supposes that the rewards of the various companies depended upon the rank of their patrons; the Queen's players receiving the highest reward; the companies of great noblemen, such as Worcester, Leicester, etc., receiving the next highest; then in the scale came the lesser noblemen's and great commoners' companies, and finally the Town Companies.² I have been unable to find any evidence in proof of the theory, except that those companies patronized by royalty and one or two of the more famous noblemen always received the greatest "rewards." Between the other companies the civic authorities do not seem to have distinguished.

On special occasions, such as May Day or Christmas, the Town Companies might receive a greater reward than usual, for in Plymouth in the years 1565-66, and 1566-67, we find such companies as the children of Totnes playing at Christmas, and the players of St. Burdock's playing on May Day, receiving 10s. reward.³

In Nottingham, Doncaster, Oxford, Shrewsbury, Bath, and Beverley the "rewards" given to players are about the same as in Plymouth and Leicester.

From 1550 to 1570 we find a steady rise in the "rewards" given to players by the town authorities. After 1570 the increase is not so marked, though there is still some noticeable.

As the visits of these itinerent companies became more frequent, the giving of rewards came to be a severe drain on the town coffers, and we are not surprised when we find the Leicester Corporation in 1566 making "an act against wasting of the town stock," in which it is set forth that—

Whereas before this time the town stock hath been and is much decayed by reason of giving, carrying, and bestowing of great gifts, as well in the country as in the town, to noble men and women, and also to others that have sundry times resorted to the said town of Leicester,

¹ KELLY, *op. cit.*, pp. 226, 227,

² *Ibid.*, p. 94.

³ R. N. WORTH, *Calendar of the Plymouth Municipal Records* (Plymouth, 1893), p. 120

and also at the banquets of venison, of gifts and rewards given to players, musicians, jesters, noblemen's bearwards, and such like charges; and is like daily to be more and more to be decayed, except reformation thereof be speedily had; therefore it is enacted, . . . that from and after the said day there shall be no such great allowance paid, delivered, or allowed out of the town stock for any such expenses that shall happen, but that the spenders thereof, as at banquets of venison, plays, bear baitings, and such like, every one of the Mayor's brethren, and of the forty-eight, being required or having summons by the commandment of Mr. Mayor for the time being, to be there, shall bear everyone of them his and their portion.¹

It is also required that no "gift" should be given by the mayor without the consent of four or five of the "ancients" of his brethren, and as many of the ancients of the forty-five, except five shillings and under; which he could bestow for the "honor of the town" as often as he wished.

In November, 1581, the giving of rewards was further restricted by an act which stated:

It is agreed that from henceforth there shall not be any fees or rewards given by the chamber of this town, nor any of the twenty-four nor forty-eight to be charged with any payments for or towards any bearwards, bearbaitings, players, plays, interludes, or games, or any of them, except the Queen's Majesty's or the Lords of the Privy Council; nor that any players be suffered to play at the town hall (except as before excepted), and then but only before the Mayor and his brethren, upon pain of 40s. to be lost by the Mayor that shall suffer or do the contrary.²

These orders do not seem to have been very rigidly enforced, however, for we find the visits of companies and the payments of "rewards" to be about as frequent after as before their enactment.

We have already seen that the city sometimes gave presents of ale or wine to companies of players when playing at private houses on festive occasions.³ Occasionally they seem to have presented the companies with gifts of ale, wine, or even a contribution toward a meal in addition to the regular reward. Thus in Beverley, August 8, 1572, we find an entry in the town records of 9*d.* "for wine bestowed" on the Earl of Leicester's players in addition to

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 94, 95 (quoted).

² *Ibid.*, p. 95 (quoted).

³ *Cf.* above, pp. 9, 10.

their reward of 30s.¹ When Worcester's men visited Leicester in 1583, "Mr. Mayor did give the aforesaid players an angel towards their dinner."²

As we should expect, the receipts of the companies while traveling in the provincial towns were much smaller than their receipts while acting at the regular theaters in London. Malone supposed that during the early seventeenth century as much as £20 was often taken at the doors of the Globe and Blackfriar's Theaters for one performance, and we know that these theaters averaged about £9 clear profit on the benefit nights for the five and a half years after 1628.³ While the receipts at the older theaters, the Rose and Curtain, were probably smaller, still they must have been considerably more than the receipts in the provincial towns, for Henslowe as manager and part owner of these theaters from 1591-97 often pocketed daily as much as £3 or £4 as his share of the profits.⁴ Even supposing that he took more than his fifteen shares of the forty which was the proportion Malone supposed the proprietors to receive, the company getting twenty-two shares, still the profits must have been more than in the towns. In addition to this, we must remember that their traveling expenses must have been considerable while on the road, and that on many days while moving from one town to another, they could give no performances.⁵

How long a company would remain in a town, or how many performances it would give, I have been unable to determine, as the town records deal almost exclusively with the single performance in which the civic authorities were financially interested. That their stay was not long we may be fairly certain. Willis, in his reference to the customs of companies playing in Gloucester, implies that they gave more than one performance during their visit,⁶ and from the account of the quarrel between the town authorities and the so-called "Servants of the Queen's Majesty's

¹ GEORGE POULSON, *History and Antiquities of Beverley* (London, 1829), quoted from records, p. 319.

² Quoted from KELLY, *op. cit.*, above, p. 7.

³ COLLIER, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 233.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ It should be remembered that from 1550 to 1600 money had about eight times its present value.

⁶ Cf. as quoted above, pp. 5, 6.

Master of the Revels" and Worcester's men in Leicester in 1583, it appears that the former company did not stay in the town more than three days, for they arrived on Tuesday, March 3, and on March 6 appear to have left the city.¹

To be sure, in the Edinburgh accounts for October, November, and December, 1599, we find records of the performances of a company of English comedians, apparently the same company.² But whether their stay in Edinburgh was continuous during these months the entries do not allow us to determine. It is, however, probable that a company would stay a few days in a town, giving daily performances.

That some companies were more popular in certain towns than in others is evident from the frequency of their visits in those localities. Thus in Bath,³ the Lord Chamberlain's, afterward the Queen's Company, is by far the most frequent visitor, while in Beverley⁴ and Oxford⁵ the Earl of Leicester's men seem to have been the favorites.

Sometimes certain companies seem to have had a practical monopoly of the patronage of a town, at least for a certain length of time. Thus at Leicester in 1581 it was enacted that from that date only the players of the Queen and Lords of the Privy Council could act in that town.⁶

That the companies while traveling materially reduced the number of their actors does not seem probable, for in the Leicester records for 1583 we have the following list of Worcester's men given:

Robert Broune	Edward Broune
James Tunstall (Dunstan?)	Richard Andrews
Edward Allen	Thomas Powlton
William Harryson	William Pateson, Lord Har-
Thomas Cooke	bard's man. ⁷
Richard Johnes	

¹ Cf. as quoted above, pp. 7, 8.

² Cf. DIBDIN, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-24.

³ AUSTIN J. KING AND B. H. WATTS, *Municipal Records of Bath, 1189-1604* (London, 1885), p. 56.

⁴ GEORGE POULSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 294-319.

⁵ *Selections from Records of Oxford from Henry VIII-Elizabeth (1509-1582)* By WILLIAM H. TURNER, (Oxford and London: Jas. Parker & Co., 1880), pp. 267 *et seq.*

⁶ KELLY, *op. cit.*, cf. above, p. 16.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

Including Pateson, this gives a company of ten players, which was about the usual number carried by a company while acting in London, if we rule out persons taking unimportant parts in certain plays requiring a large cast. Undoubtedly a company while traveling would present only such plays as could be acted by an average number of players, and so do away with the expense of taking with them actors for unimportant parts.

In closing this paper, I wish to emphasize again the popularity of professional dramatic performances in England during the latter half of the sixteen century. There can be no doubt that that there were frequent quarrels between the town authorities and the traveling dramatic companies, and that among the more religious element of the citizens there was a feeling of opposition to dramatic performances as savoring of the devil; still such a statement as Mr. Courthope's in his *History of English Poetry* that "from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards the representation of stage plays, always encouraged by the nobility, had been *vehemently opposed* by the magistrate in almost every considerable city in England,"¹ can be nothing but misleading. The evidence he adduces to prove his statement is that "in 1572 the corporation of Leicester refused leave to the Earl of Worcester's players to act in the town."² Possibly this is true, though I have been unable to find the entry. Even so, the magistrates often had other reasons than religious ones³ for refusing to allow the players to perform. At any rate, we know that in 1572 Worcester's men did act in Leicester, for in the town records we find the following entry under that date:

Item. Given to the Lord of Worcester's Players, more than was gathered — 8s.⁴

Also from 1571 to 1576 we find records of the Queen's Players, the Players of Coventry, Lord Leicester's players, Lord Sussex' men, Lord Derby's Bearward and Essex' men, the players that came out of Wales, and Earl of Warwick's men, playing in that

¹ W. J. COURTHOPE, *History of English Poetry* (London, 1903), Vol. IV, p. 391.

² *Ibid.*

³ The context of the above quotation from Mr. Courthope implies that the magistrates of Leicester thus refused Worcester's men permission to play on religious grounds; cf. p. 391.

⁴ KELLY, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

town.¹ A reference to the town records of Nottingham, Oxford, Shrewsbury, Bristol, Doncaster, Beverley, Plymouth, Bath and Stratford-on-Avon shows frequent visits of dramatic companies. If the magistrates were so "vehemently opposed" to the "stage plays," it is remarkable that they so often should have not only allowed them to play, but attended the first performances, given the players "rewards" out of the city coffers, permitted them to act in the guild-hall or church, and even in some cases built play-houses for their performances; that in 1572 "John Hankey, Mayor of Chester would needs have the plays go forward against the wills of the Bishops of Canterbury, York, and Chester,"² and the plays were miracle plays at that. In fact, the state of the case seems to have been that the great body of English citizens, both magistrates and private citizens, were not only willing but glad to welcome the properly authorized dramatic companies to their towns and to attend their performances. Even the more Puritanical element did not so much object to the plays of the regular professional companies as to the miracle- and mystery-plays, and the popular amusements, such as the May games and Morrice dances. The former they connected with the ritual of the Roman Catholic church, which they hated, and the latter with paganism. To assert, then, that, because a small and comparatively uninfluential body of extremely strict Protestants and Roman Catholics loathed dramatic performances, the people of England were "vehemently opposed" to the stage, is both misleading and unjust.

Thus we have seen that during the latter half of the sixteenth century the professional actors superseded the old amateur players in the favor of the British public; that the professional companies, when traveling among the provincial towns, carried their usual number of players and, though not making such large profits as in London, managed to clear enough out of the admission fees they exacted, and the "gifts" or "rewards" of the corporations, to make their tours not unprofitable; that when in these towns they gave their plays at private houses, inns, inn-yards, churches, town- or guild-halls, and play- or game-houses where

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 204-6.

² E. K. CHAMBERS, *The Mediæval Stage*, Vol. II, p. 353.

such existed, and that in those towns where the companies were accustomed to play in the church or town- or guild-hall they might even demand a "reward" if the town council refused to allow them to use these buildings for their performances; that in some towns one or two companies had a practical monopoly of the patronage of that town; and that, in spite of their occasional quarrels with the civil and spiritual authorities, these professional companies were popular with all but the extremely strict element of Protestant and Roman Catholic citizens of England.

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NOTE.—As the examination of the material connected with this subject is still going on with a view to the publication of a history of the dramatic companies, I wish it to be understood that the opinions expressed in this article are more or less tentative.